THE UNIQUENESS OF DOOYEWEERD'S PROGRAM FOR PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE: WHENCE THE DIFFERENCE?

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> "There can be no difference anywhere that doesn't make
> a difference elsewhere - no difference in abstract
> truth that doesn't express itself in a difference in
> concrete fact and in conduct consequent upon that fact
> imposed on somebody, somehow, somewhere, and somewhen."
> (William James, *Essays on Pragmatism*)

1.Introduction

Of all Christian philosophers, only Herman Dooyeweerd began his work with the conviction that there must be a uniquely biblical perspective for theory making such that no theory in philosophy or the sciences can be religiously neutral. In his own words, this meant seeking an "inner reformation of philosophy" to expose just how religious belief regulates theory making such that the content of any hypothesis differs relative to the religious belief it pre- supposes. Since this entails that belief in God also makes such differences, Dooyeweerd refused to begin his task by seeing how far he could adapt any extant philosophy to Christian belief. In this respect he differed significantly from even the greatest previous Christian thinkers such as Augustine who adapted neo-Platonism, or Aquinas who adapted the Aristotlean form/matter dualism. But revolutionary as that sounds, the true extent of the distinctive- ness of his "inner reformation" is not adequately conveyed if it is taken to mean only that Christians should not begin to philosophize by taking over the specific contents of some other philosophy. It went much further because it also meant rejecting the *strategy* by which virtually every previous ontology had been constructed.

The strategy of Western ontologies had always been to explain the nature of reality by some type of reduction theory. The strategy essentially consists of abstracting from among the large scale kinds of properties and laws the world exhibits (Dooyeweerd called such kinds "aspects"), and identifying some one or two of them as the basic nature of reality on the ground that all the rest reduce to them in one of two senses. The stronger reduction claim says that the particular aspect favored by a theory can be shown to be the only kind of properties and laws things actually have; all other putative aspects are dismissed as mistakes of common sense. This makes the aspect favored by the theory to be the basic nature of all things by default: there's no other nature they *could* have. By contrast, the weaker version admits that there are many aspects true of creation. It locates the basic nature of things by arguing that some one or two aspects are basic to all the rest in the sense of being able to exist without the rest while the rest cannot exist without the one(s) favored by the theory. The status of the remaining aspects is therefore "reduced" in that they are dependent, though not eliminated.

While the stronger form of reduction has never been popular among Christian thinkers, the weaker version has had a lot of adherents among Christians. Most Christian (and other theistic) philosophers have seen no difficulty with theories that understand vast tracts of what is given to human experience as the product of one or two aspects of creation, so long as those aspects were in turn said to depend on God. But Dooyeweerd contended that the main way belief in God impacts theories is by requiring a thorough and systematic eschewal of *all* reduction, thus abandoning an almost 3000 year old strategy for ontology. As a consequence, it was Dooyeweerd alone who produced an ontology in which all the aspects of creation are equally real because mutually

irreducible, inextricably connected, and universal in scope. All the other unique concepts and theories contained in his philosophy may be fairly seen as elaborations and extensions of his nonreductionist ontology.

It was the nonreductionist strategy which led, for example, to his rejection of the concept of substance as a way of identifying the distinctive natures of things. Substance was replaced in his philosophy by a combination of a thing's qualifying function plus its individuality structure. Avoiding reduction also led to his theory of "cosmic time" in which time was also viewed as irreduc- ibly multi-aspectual as to its order, while duration served as the common denominator of all the kinds of order. The same is true of his conception of the "unfolding process" to explain how cultures undergo historical progress or regress, and his distinction between part/whole relations and whole/whole "enkaptic" relations. These - and many other original concepts and theories - were part and parcel of a nonreductionist program which resulted in unique interpretive differences ranging from the level of a general theory of reality all the way down to the individual concepts of every science. *After all, not just every hypothesis, but every concept is either reductionist or it is not*. For that reason Dooyeweerd's ontology provides more guidance for theorizing in the sciences, and makes a greater impact on their content, than any other ontology ever proposed.

But such a sharp difference in the overall strategy for theories cannot help but raise two questions. The first concerns the source and justification of his conviction about the impossibility of religiously neutral knowledge which requires that belief in God have a universal and pervasive influence on theories. Surely the majority of Christians and other theists in philosophy have not sought to develop theories that are internally and pervasively regulated by belief in God. Rather

than suppose that belief in God must make a difference to every theory and concept, most have sought theories which are simply at peace with belief in God. In other words, they have held that theories are christianly accept- able if only they are compatible with the Faith so that both theories and belief in God enjoy a mutual non-aggression pact. That is why there have been Christian materialists, dualists, idealists, empiricists, Kantians, existentialists, Marxists, etc. Where, then, did Dooyeweerd get the idea that Christian theism demanded that he start by rejecting the very possibility of theory-neutrality, thereby placing his work under such a demanding initial constraint? More importantly, was he right?

The second question is why Dooyeweerd seems to be so unique in maintaining that belief in God must have such a pervasive impact, and in seeing the rejection of reduction as the explanation of how that impact works. Confronted with such a radically different program, one is left with an uneasy feeling: if belief in God really requires something as basic and important as the rejection of all reduction, why haven't others also seen that by now? What explanation can be offered for why so many other Christian thinkers have not seen - and still do not see - belief in God as requiring the construction of wholly nonreductionist theories?

2. The Calvinist Sources of Dooyeweerd's Program

Surely the first place to look for the source of the convic-tion that knowledge - and therefore theories - can't be religiously neutral is in the enormous influence of Abraham Kuyper. It was from Kuyper that Dooyeweerd heard words like these:

> "Especially the leading thought which we have formed in that realm of life which holds our chiefest interests, exercises a mighty dominion on the whole content of our consciousness, viz. our religious views... If then we make a mistake...[about religion] how can it fail but communicate itselfdisastrously to our entire scientific study?" (*Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, II,2,43)

Kuyper held that God's revelation, by presenting us with the true Divine Creator instead of a mistake, not only provides us with the way of salvation but with the right path for philosophy and science as well:

> "..the Holy Scripture does not only cause us to find justification by faith, but also discloses the foundation of all human life...which must govern all human existence." (*Lectures on Calvinism*, vi)

And that is what led him to utter the memorable line: "There is not a square inch of our whole human existence of which Christ does not say: Mine!" (*Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring*, p.5)

There is no doubt whatever that Dooyeweerd followed Kuyper in this conviction. But he did so not just because he admired Kuyper, or even because the position had been held earlier by Calvin,[1] but because he believed it to derive from the Scriptures themselves. And that is the crucial point. For while Dooyeweerd *received* the view that theories cannot be religiously neutral from his

Calvinist heritage, for him that was not what *warranted* it. The warrant for that conviction was nothing less than that Scripture taught it, and it is on that ground alone that it stood or fell.

Now it is undeniable that bible writers do make the claim that having the true God is a precondition for all knowledge and truth. Such assertions can be found in Ps. 36:9, 111:10; Prov. 1:7, 9:10, 15:23; Jer. 8:8-9; Luke 11:34-35 & 52; Eph. 5:8,9; and Col. 2:3. (And still other texts take on new meaning in the light of those, such as Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4: 17-18.) But the majority of Christian thinkers seem to have taken the scope of such assertions as poetic exaggeration intended only to express how different life seems to those who have come to know God. According to the majority construal, it isn't really *all* truth that is dependent on having the right God but all truth *about the supernatural realm* that does. Onthis view, the realm of nature, observable by believer and un- believer alike, does not *require* revelation in order to be understood, even though revelation can at times aid in understanding it. Rather, it is information about God, the soul, life after death, angels, etc., that depends on accepting God's revelation and is therefore lost to those who do not believe in God.

Why, then, did Calvin and Kuyper take the texts which declare all truth and knowledge to depend upon having the right God as meaning exactly that? Why did Dooyeweerd follow them in this and set out to discover just how that dependency works? This is the issue which lies at the heart of the difference to be explained. For it was this initial conviction - brought to theorizing rather than derived from it - which led him to maintain that no theory can fail to presuppose an *religious* internal regulating principle which is either belief in God or in some God-surrogate. And this, in turn, is what led him to find the difference between those two sorts of regulating principles as

centering in the rejection of all reductionism. It is reduction, he argued, which (partially) falsifies every truth that is recognized from any nontheistic point of view, but which is - in principle - avoidable from the theistic standpoint. This is because he saw reductionism as the reflection of false religion in theories; it is the very idolatrous deification of some aspect of creation that is condemned in Rom. 1:25. So the question comes down to this: what has led the majority to understand as hyperbole the Scripture texts which say that all knowledge and truth depend on belief in God, while for Dooyeweerd the prima facie meaning of those texts is the key to biblically motivated theory making?

3. The Hermeneutical Issue and the Nature of God

I do not think that the way to answer the last question is to say that Calvin, Kuyper, and Dooyeweerd merely dogmatically *insist* on the prima facie meaning of the texts. There are other Scripture texts whose prima facie meanings are not the interpretations that have come to prevail, and there can be good reason for this. Every attempt to interpret Scripture involves hermeneutical priorities. In the struggle to develop a consistent understanding of Biblical revelation, the prima facie meaning of certain texts can at times rightly be rejected in favor of another construal provided the other is: 1) textually and contextually plausible, and 2) required to preserve consistency with other doctrines that are both clearer and more fundamental. In fact, Dooyeweerd himself has given a summary of such fundamental doctrines in what he calls the biblical groundmotive for theorizing: creation, fall, redemption, and the communion of believers in the Holy Spirit (*New Critique*. I, 61).

Now it is just such a construal-for-the-sake-of-consistency that I find at work in the

majority's interpretation of the texts cited earlier.[2] Their prima facie meaning, according to which their claim has universal application, has most often been set aside in favor of an interpretation which takes that claim to be limited to information about the supernatural realm of grace. In this way, knowledge of the natural world is exempted from dependency on belief in God. This is what allows theories of philosophy and science to be acceptable for the Christian provided they are merely externally compatible with - rather than internally regulated by - belief in God. But since the results of this construal for theor-izing are so different from those of the prima facie meaning of the texts, it is worth examining the more fundamental doctrine for the sake of which that meaning was set aside. Just what doctrine is it whose importance trumps the prima facie meaning of these texts, and does so in a way that virtually reverses their import for theories?

The doctrine I believe exercises the controlling interest in the majority's construal of these texts is, indeed, a fundamental one. In fact, it is nothing less than the theologically predominant view of the nature of God (and it would be hard to think of any- thing more fundamental than that!). So if the majority view of that doctrine is correctly conceived, then construing the cited texts so as to be compatible with it is perfectly proper procedure. The issue turns, then, not on the hermeneutical practice employed but on the truth of that view of the nature of God. That is what lies at the core of the difference between the majority position on the relation of belief in God to theories and the position adumbrated by Calvin, formulated by Kuyper, and so impressively developed by Dooyeweerd.

The view of God referred to above as the "predominant" one has a long and distinguished history. It was encouraged by certain elements in the thought of Augustine, consolidated by

Anselm, and systematically elaborated by Aquinas, to name but a few of its more eminent exponents. Put simply, it is the view which says God is to be defined as the being with all and only perfections. This means that God, to be God, must have the highest possible degree of power, knowledge, goodness, love, justice, mercy, wisdom, beauty, and whatever other properties there may be which make something greater if it has them. Or, to state it more precisely: God must have the highest possible degree of these properties that are logically co-possible with one another in the same being, so that he is the most perfect being possible. The perfections comprising God's nature are, of course, uncreated and not within God's own control; God can no more help having them than, say, the number three can help being odd. Moreover, these perfections are logically necessary taken singly and necessarily possessed by God taken collectively: they cannot fail to exist, cannot be other than what they are, and cannot fail to be parts of God's nature. They include God's existence, so it too is logically necessary.

This view of God's nature also requires, however, that when- ever creatures share to a lesser degree a property that God has in the highest possible degree, that property is as uncreated in them as it is in God. Since those properties already exist and are uncreated in God, God cannot call them into being as he does the rest of creation but can only *impart* those properties to creatures; as Aquinas puts it, the lesser degrees of those perfections "flow from God to creatures" (*S.T.*, Q 6, art 2). For example, since God is perfectly self-consistent, logical laws and properties have necessary and uncreated existence; conforming to those laws is necessarily a property of every creature as well as of God (*S.T.* Q.25, art.3). God may choose which things to create, but He cannot choose whether those things will conform to the logical laws any more than He can choose whether He

himself does. Or again, God is one essence in three persons, so that numbers are also uncreated and all the mathematical truths are as eternal and necessary as the logical truths; they are uncaused and unpreventable both in God and in creation (so Aquinas: *Disputations*, VI *de Potentia*, I, ad II). It is different, of course, when it comes to physical properties since God doesn't have those. God can choose to create matter or not, make it to be any way He wishes, and create any physical laws He cares to devise. The same holds for other kinds of properties and laws that are true of creatures but not true of God. God brought it about that there are creatures with spatial, biotic, sensory, historical, and economic properties, e.g., and he brought into being the nomological and/or normative orders that hold for such kinds. These could have existed or not and could have been whatever God chose to make them within the limits imposed by the necessary truths established by His own perfections.

This view of God's nature has severe internal difficulties that are beyond the scope of this essay to explore.[3] But the important thing to notice in the present context is that so far as both ontology and science are concerned, *this view requires precisely the sort of reductionism that Dooyeweerd contends biblical theism forbids*. For it requires that whatever kinds of properties and laws are true of God are as uncreated when they occur in creatures as they are in God. It requires - for example, in Aquinas' version - that the logical, mathematical, and ethical properties and laws are uncreated because they are true of God (or just *are* God). Therefore as these properties and laws occur in creation, they must be basic to other kinds of properties and laws in the sense that the others depend on them while they do not depend on any of the others. And this is exactly the (weak) reductionist strategy for ontology that is the basis for the idea of substance to account for the natures of creatures.[4]

This is not to say there is no difference between theistic versions of reductionist ontologies and their pagan-based counter- parts. But, as was mentioned earlier, the main difference between them does not effect their central content, but it lies in an addendum to it. That is, while theistic versions of form/matter dualism, materialism, phenomenalism, idealism, mind/body dualism, etc., start with the traditional procedure of identifying certain aspects of creation as basic because they make all the others possible, they do not end there. To avoid outright conflict with the doctrine of creation, a theistic version of reduction requires that a claim be appended stipulating that the aspects identified as basic depend, in turn, on God or are identical with God's own being. That extra claim is regarded as all it takes to baptize the theory into the fellowship of Christian acceptability.

By contrast, Dooyeweerd held that Christian theism requires that all aspects of creation depend directly and equally on God, without the mediation of any others supposed to be more real and thus the cause(s) of the rest. Early in the development of his thought, he said:

> "...every [aspect] is demarcated by divine ordinances, which do not appeal (not even indirectly) for their validity to the ordinances of [other aspects] but derive their validity only and exclusively from divine sovereignty itself. In every category of divine ordinances divine sovereignty is expressed directly. This foundational idea implies a distinction in principle of the divine ordinances for the different [aspects] from the juridical ordinances...[to those for] morality, economic life, science, art, etc." (letter to D.J. Ridderbos, Jan. 16, 1924 cited in *Illuminating Law*, R.D. Henderson, p.47)

This he referred to as an affirmation of the "Reformed conception of the sovereignty of God over all creation". So it is no wonder that reductionism as a strategy for theories became the target of a two-pronged attack by Dooyeweerd.

The first prong of his attack was a religious objection. With Calvin and Kuyper, he maintained that the biblical doctrine of creation entails that nothing in creation is uncreated (*A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I,10 & 19-21). This not only means that individuals of all types have been brought into being by God, but that so have all the properties they possess and -especially -all the laws which govern them. The second prong of the attack was philosophical: his transcendental critique devastated every claim to be able to conceive of any aspect of creation independently of all the others, and thus exposed the incoherencies involved in every attempt to justify reductionist theories (*N.C.* I,46). In this way he showed that it is not just the physical, biotic, or sensory aspects that cannot be conceived as having independent existence, but the logical, mathematical, and ethical as well.

Clearly, then, Dooyeweerd's idea of the Reformed conception of God's sovereignty over all creation, and his attacks on even the weak version of reduction, presuppose the falsity of the majority view of the nature of God. So let us press our title question, "Whence the Difference?" further. What view of God's nature did he take?

3. The Cappadocian and Calvinist View of the Nature of God

I believe that the answer is that Dooyeweerd took a view of God's nature which rejected the absolutizing of the attributes ascribed to God in Scripture, and sided instead with the way Luther

and Calvin "discovered anew the...relationship between divine hiddenness and revelation in Scripture"[5] which had been emphasized by the Cappadocian Fathers: Gregory Nazianzus, Basil of Ceasarea, his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and their sister Macrina - who was the tutor and mentor of them all. As Jaroslav Pelikan points out, they held a more radical idea of God's inconceivability, and thus of his transcendence, than is found in Aquinas.[6] Rather than view the nature of God as identical with the simple unity of all his perfections as Aquinas later did, the Cappadocians explicitly distinguished God's being from his perfections which depend on that being. According to them God's being is "*not* the unity of his perfections" (p.55) and is "above all notion of degree [of properties]" (p.84). Thus God's unknowability does not consist in that fact that He has other properties we don't know but in the fact that, as Basil put it, the being of God is "free from qualities" altogether (p.242). To this Gregory of Nyssa added that when negative terms are applied to God they signify "the absence of non-inherent qualities rather than the presence of inherent qualities" as they do when applied to creatures (p.40-2). Thus the divine being is "unlike anything that can be known" (p.50- 3) because "all that is rational belongs to creation" (p.84). God is therefore "incomprehensible to human reason" not because of the Fall, but because of the creator-creature distinction which is the most fundamental difference in all reality (pp.51-3).

Nor did the Cappadocians shrink from the implications of their position for the doctrine of the Trinity. The persons of the Trinity are, they said, names of God's relationship to humanity and of the persons to one another. But even those names do not designate the uncreated being of God (p.212), which is why the language of dependence ("begotten", "proceeds") can be used of the Son and the Holy Spirit (p. 236). That dependency is, of course, an eternal dependence since God is

outside time. But this is still all "economical" language of God as-he-is-toward-us (pp.233-4, 240-1) and does not tell us what God's uncreated being is.[7]

Of course, it is really true of God that he stands in such relations; the Cappadocian position is nothing like that of modern views under the influence of Kant or pragmatism. The revealed truths about God are just that: truths. But those facts about God which humans are capable of knowing when revealed by God, still depend upon the unknowable being of God which generates them (pp.209-10). Thus even for faith, says Nyssa, "the Divine has its being precisely where thought does not reach" (p. 216). Not surprisingly, this view of the nature of God led these thinkers to the conclusion that it is beyond the proper bounds of both philosophy and theology to theorize about the being of God (p.50). It leads, said Basil, to "a total rest from speculation" about God (p.201).

But that very fact is what they saw as freeing human reason, including speculative theorizing, to investigate creation and to make the order of the cosmos intelligible (p.91). Their position goes roughly like this. They held that philosophy is the attempt to make clear "the harmony of the whole" (p.92) and science is a gift from God not to be rejected (pp.102-3). There is, however, a fundamental philosophical connection between the right understanding of God and the understanding of the world order (p.91). Having the truth about God exposes a danger in science, namely, that the truths it discovers may be regarded as "supernatural" so that it degenerates into pseudo-science (p.100). This is what happens when- ever any principles of the created order are taken to be uncreated, such as those of mathematics (p.101-2). There are, to be sure, principles of necessity which hold for creatures, but these do not themselves exist necessarily but by the free sovereign will of God (p.105). There is no necessity in creation over which God is power- less

(p.256). Both space and time, and whatever forms, goods, or other existences there are, have all been created by God (pp.77, 80-1,105). Moreover, there is also a fundamental connection between the right understanding of the self (as well as God) to understanding the world: self-knowledge is a requirement for a proper grasp of the value aspects of creation and of epistemology (pp 58-9).

To anyone familiar with Calvin's *Institutes* and commentaries, the parallels with these Cappadocian writings have to appear striking. Calvin also insists that the essence of God is unknowable (*Comm. on Genesis*, vol 1,60; *Inst* I,v,9; I,xiii,21) and is not to be identified with the unity of his perfections (*Inst*. I,x,2). For Calvin, too, the being of God is known only apophatically: it is beyond time and is nondependent (*Inst* I,xiv,3). The kataphatic attributes, on the other hand, are not necessary, uncreated, and beyond God's control: "...in the enumeration of his perfections [in Scripture] he is described not as he is in himself, but in relation to us..." (*Inst* I,x,2). Since these perfections exist in creation, they may not be seen as uncreated and identical with God's being (*Inst* I,x,2), but as constituting "the character in which [God] is pleased to manifest himself" (*Inst* III,ii,6).[8] So it is no surprise that Calvin also condemns ascribing nondependent existence to anything but God (*Inst* I,xiv,3), and maintains that God's will remains sovereign over all creation: "The Divine will...is itself ... the cause of all that exists" (*Inst*. III,xxiii,2). Calvin also insists repeatedly that this includes the laws which govern creation, so that they do not govern God - not even the laws of justice and morality (*Inst* III,xxiii,2; III,xxiv,17; *De Aeternal Praedestinatione*, C.R. 36, 36). Finally, Calvin also maintains that a right understanding of creation depends on having the right God (see note 1), and that the knowledge of God is tied to true self-knowledge (Inst I,i,1-3).

In pointing out such parallels, I do not mean to suggest that Calvin necessarily derived them directly from the Cappadocian Fathers. Undoubtably he read their writings, since he does refer to them in the *Institutes* (though seldom). On the other hand, there is ample evidence that Augustine was greatly influenced by them, and that Calvin was greatly influenced by Augustine (whom he cites over 250 times in the *Institutes*). But however the lines of influence may be drawn, the important difference over the nature of God between the Cappadocians, Calvin, and Kuyper on the one side, and Anselm and Aquinas on the other side, seems clear. For Anselm and Aquinas the perfections are paramount. God, by definition, must have all and only perfections to be God, and God has no control over those perfections and other necessary truths. Anselm stresses that necessary existence is one of those perfections so that it is self-contradictory to deny that God exists (*Proslogion*); Aquinas denies that argument, but still holds God's being to be identical with the unity of all the perfections (*S.Th.* I,a,3 & 4; *S.C.G.* I, 38; *Compendium Theologiae* 50). By contrast, the Cappadocians and Calvin insist God's being is not identical with his perfections, which are ways he freely and graciously relates to humans.

That Dooyeweerd's view of God's nature follows that of the Cappadocians and Calvin, cannot be seriously doubted. There is much in the Cappadocian thought that Dooyeweerd finds still far too neo-Platonist, just as he objected to the remnants of such elements in the thought of Calvin. But they are all at one in understanding the biblical doctrine of creation as requiring that God transcends every aspect of creation and that there is nothing about creation that is uncreated.[9] In fact, Dooyeweerd's way of putting the transcendence of the being of God is, if anything, even stronger than theirs. In his terminology, only God has being - by which he means absolute,

nondependent being (*N.C.* I,73). The mode of creaturely existence is that of meaning; all the kinds of properties and laws true of creatures are essentially related to one another and to God on whom they depend. So he says that the being of God transcends every aspect of meaning in creation (*N.C.* I,9-11,16,97; II,11 & 58,590). This, of course, includes the laws of those aspects. While all creatures exist subject to the created law order (*N.C.* II,31), the creator of all laws is not subject to any - including the so-called necessary truths such as the laws of logic and mathematics (*N.C.* I,81-2,92-3,99,144-5,549; II,551).[10] Thus all speculative metaphysics about the nature of God is illicit (*N.C.* I,93), and "whatever can be proven would thereby not be God".[11] As for the kataphatic knowledge of God vouchsafed to us by Scripture, Dooyeweerd uses the same expression as did Luther and Calvin when he says: "the Divine Word revelation came to us in the temporal garb of human language" (*N.C.* II,561). Like the Cappadocians and Calvin before him, Dooyeweerd insists that only God has non-dependent being; attributing that to anything in addition to God is polytheism (*N.C.* I,20-21), and ascribing it to anything instead of God is idolatry (*N.C.* I,55,97; II,14).

4. A Comparison of the Two Views of God's Nature

The conflict between these two views of the nature of God cannot - obviously - be argued adequately in the few remaining pages of this essay. But some indication is in order as to how the line of argument could go. Let me start by summarizing what seems objectionable in the view that God must have (or be) all and only perfections.

4.1 First, combining perfections (thought of in the way Plato thought of Forms) with Yahweh seems to make the perfections conditions for the existence of God, since God must have all the perfections in order to be God. Aquinas saw that consequence and (correctly) found it wholly unacceptable. So he proposed that God be understood to be identical with the perfections rather than as possessing them. But since there is only one God, Aquinas drew the inference that all the perfections must be identical with one another since they are identical with God. This, however, makes God to be a single abstract perfection, which is incompatible with almost everything Christian theism teaches about God: that God is alive, knowledgeable, powerful, and good, for example.[12] So that way round the difficulty seems to create worse difficulties.

4.1.2 Second, the very notion of a perfection as the highest possible degree of a positive (or great-making) property is *never* one that Scripture ascribes to God and is at odds with the way Scripture does speak of God's attributes. When Scripture speaks at all of "perfection" it does so in the sense of "complete" or "unfailing", rather than of the maximal or infinite degree of a quality (and most of the occurrences of "perfect" in Scripture apply it to humans, not God, as when people are said to have a "perfect heart", e.g.) Perhaps the best example of this difference in meaning is in found in Matt 5:48 where Jesus tells his disciples that they should be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect. That would be sheer lunacy on the Anselm/Aquinas view of perfection since it would be telling them that they should be omnipotent, omniscient, and in fact identical with God! But in the Scriptural sense of "perfect", Jesus was telling the disciples they should uphold their end of the covenant as *unfailingly* as God upholds his.

This is not, of course, to suggest that God's knowledge or power or goodness are not greater than anything possible for humans. That God's attributes far exceed the same properties in humans is, indeed, a teaching of Scripture. But that is very different from a neo-Platonic conception of infinite qualitative degrees of those properties.

4.1.3 Third, it seems clear from Scripture that God often acts in ways that do not exhibit the highest possible degree of some of his attributes;[13] Calvin recognized that, and insisted God was not bound to do so (*Inst* I,xv,8; III, xxiii,2 & 4). The biblical view of God's goodness, e.g., is not that God cannot help having a perfection which guarantees that he will conform in the highest degree to the moral rules that apply to humans. Rather it consists in his freely binding himself to specific covenantal promises of goodness although he was under no antecedent moral obligation to do so.

4.1.4 Finally, there is striking Scriptural support for the view that God is not identical with his perfections in Prov. 8. That passage says of one of God's "perfections", wisdom, that God created it. And that is the very reverse of maintaining that all perfections exist necessarily, that God cannot help but have them, and that God must have them to be God.

4.2 To be sure, there are also objections to the Cappadocian and Calvinist view of God's nature. So I will also offer a brief indication of how several of the most obvious of them can be handled. The objections will be put in the form of a series of questions.

4.2.1 The relational view of God's attributes means that God did not have to have any of them to be God, but has taken them on for the sake of relating to humans in just the ways he reveals in the covenant. Does this mean, then, that there ever was a time when God was not wise, or powerful, or good? If so, aren't those attributes not *really* what God is? And wouldn't it mean that God could really be ignorant or evil?

First, the relational view does not entail that there ever was a *time* when God didn't have wisdom, power, or goodness since God created time too. So God could have taken on the attributes Scripture ascribes to him from the beginning of time. Thus this theology can hold that God's character is, indeed, "from ever- lasting to everlasting". Secondly, the attributes comprising God's character are no less true of God if we take the position that God created them and assumed them to himself. Consider briefly his attribute of being the creator: God brought into existence and took on the relation being-the-creator-of-the-world simultaneously with creating the world; prior to creating God didn't stand in that relation or have that property. But being the creator of the world is no less true of God for being a property that he created and took on. But if that makes sense, why is there any incoherency in understanding God's wisdom, goodness, and power in the same way? Lastly, this view cannot possibly entail that God would have such attributes as ignorance or evil. Aside from the properties and relations God created and takes on, God would have none at all - not the compliments of those being denied as intrinsic to him. (This was already made clear in the quotes from St Basil and St Gregory).

4.2.2 But wouldn't God have to have power in order to create? Mustn't at least *that* attribute be necessary and intrinsic to God?

The answer is that power, in every sense that we know of it, has been brought into existence by God. God, in relation to creation, assumes and exercises all power and is called "Almighty" in Scripture for that reason. Notice that Scripture says God has "all power in heaven and in earth", which means all the power there is *in creation*, and speaks of that power as never coming to an end (Rom 1:20). So we should not suppose that God's exercise of any kind of power in creation is the same as God's calling all creation (and all the powers in it) into existence. For the same reason, it is strictly speaking wrong to say God is the cause of the world; rather, God is the creator of every kind of causality in creation. We cannot understand God's creation out of nothing in the same terms that we understand power or causality within creation. God's creating out of nothing is not an event in space or time but is what brought space and time into being. And since it brought into being all the laws that govern creation - including the logical laws - it cannot be logically conceived. We have no concept of it, but only this limiting idea: without God nothing else would be (Cmp *N.C.*, II, 40-41).

4.2.3 But if we are left with no way to conceive of the being of God at all, what is then the difference between this view and the Hindu teaching about Brahman-Atman?

There are two very important differences. In the Hindu tradition, every ascription of any quality to Brahman-Atman, and therefore all concepts of it, are *false*. Spiritual progress is, in large part, the process of overcoming belief in any concept, and achieving the mystical experience in

which one becomes identical with Brahman-Atman (Nirvana). In Christianity, I'm suggesting, God accommodates himself to humans by taking on (created) relations and attributes we can understand, which constitute the personality or "character in which he is pleased to manifest himself" (Calvin). It was that character which God conferred on Jesus along with assuming to himself Jesus' entire (creaturely) nature in the incarnation.

In other words, the revealed nature of God prior to the incarnation is also to be understood on the model of the doctrine of the incarnation. The revealed nature and personality of God is the result of the same sort of divine self-accommodation which the Athanasian Creed describes when it says that the unity of God in Christ is not one in which God "transforms deity into humanity" but came about "because God has taken humanity into himself". So God, who would otherwise be unknowable, has made himself knowable and accessible. And it is precisely God as knowable and accessible that is the truth which is revealed and is to be believed (cmp the earlier quote from Luther). It is not as though the only real truth is that God unknowable while the personality, relations, and other attributes ascribed to God in Scripture are but human mythological attempts to express what cannot be expressed (as in Hinduism).

Moreover, it is the *entirety* of God which has, through self-accommodation, become knowable and has been revealed in the histor- ical process which culminated in the incarnation. We know this becauase the new Testament insists that it is the whole of God's being that is invested in the incarnation: "For in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily..."(Col. 2:9).

4.2.4 But how, then, can we be sure that God may not change? If the attributes ascribed to him

are not necessary truths over which even God has no control, couldn't God decide to go back on what has been revealed?

The answer to this is that we have God's promise to remain forever faithful to what he has offered to be toward those who love him. In comparison to that oath, no other assurance could be as great, and nothing else is to be trusted as guaranteeing *it*. So the proper answer is not to look for assurance from modal logic or metaphysical theories which try to prove God could not be otherwise, as did Anselm and Descartes. To do that is to run a logical credit check on God that ends up putting ultimate trust in the laws of logic rather than in God's promises.

4.2.5 But doesn't the position that all the laws which hold for creation were created by God - even the laws of logic - destroy the very notion of necessary truth? If the laws don't hold for God too, then doesn't that mean God could violate them? In that case we seem to be admitting that God can make 2 + 2 + 7, or create four-sided triangles? Couldn't it even allow that he bring it about that he himself doesn't exist?[14] Surely a position that results in such absurdities can't be right!

If this position really resulted in absurdities such as these it would, indeed, be in big trouble. But there is no reason to understand God's transcendence of the laws of creation as his ability to *violate* them or to make creatures violate them. That is not what is being claimed at all. Saying God transcends the laws of creation means that those laws do not *apply* to God except insofar as God freely abides by them by taking on covenantal relations. They of course do apply to the properties and relations God has taken on for the sake of the covenant, since those are created and subject to the law-order God has established for creation. This remains the case even though that law-order

does not apply to the unrevealed and inconceivable being of God as it would be aside from those properties and relations.

But to say that the laws of creation don't apply to God's being is not to say God violates them; in order for God to violate them they would have to apply to him in the first place. For example, suppose it is a biological law that if humans eat only junk food, abuse drugs, and get inadequate sleep, they cannot be healthy. Such a law would not apply to the rocks in my garden, but that doesn't mean they *break* that law. The law just doesn't *apply*. In the same way, saying that God transcends the logical laws does not mean God is self-contradictory, but that God brought those laws into existence so that they do not automatically apply to him as they do to creatures. It also means that he did not have to create just the laws that he did, so that his creating was not limited to what the laws of math and logic allow as possible. Rather, God created all the senses of possibility there are in creation. But at the same time we must remember that since the logical laws are among those which God did in fact build into creation, and since they govern our thinking, we cannot conceive of what a creation would be like which lacked that order.

Now the examples given to show that this position leads to absurdity forget exactly the latter point: they purport to conceive (in accordance with logical laws) what creation would be like without logical laws! And for that reason they all fail to be examples of what they're supposed to be examples of. It's not the case that without the laws of identity and noncontradiction 2 + 2 could equal anything whatever, because not only the connections between the numbers would be effected, but the concepts of the numbers to be connected. But the example loses sight of that, and deals with our conceptions of "2" and "+" and "=" as they now are, namely, subject to the logical laws. So,

too, for the meaning of "triangle", "side", and "4" in the question "Can God make 4-sided triangles?". No concept we can now form by using logical laws would be the same if there were no such laws or if God made creatures which violate them. So we literally cannot think of what a creation would be like without those laws. It certainly wouldn't be anything like *this* creation. And that - once again - is exactly why all the alleged examples of what their absence would mean fail to be examples of that, and show that the arguments to that effect beg the question.

The question at issue is begged because the very phrasing of the objections already assumes that nothing really could exist that is not subject to the laws of logic. That is why they proceed to apply those laws in order to determine what they suppose to be the logical consequences of the denial they apply to God. But - once again - all that does is produce *logical* concepts of absurdities that are supposed to result if logical laws didn't apply! So it should be clear that attempting to evaluate the claim that logical laws don't apply to God by applying logical laws to form concepts of what that would mean, begs the question against the claim. To do that is simply to assume the logical laws must and do apply. Those who do this therefore end up supposing they have shown a fault with the proposal that God's being is not subject to logical laws, when what they have really shown is that they never took the proposal seriously at all.[15]

At the same time, it needs to be kept in mind that creatures *are* subject to the law order God has ordained including, of course, the logical laws: it is really true that they cannot both possess and not possess the same property at the same time. And the fact that God's being transcends that order doesn't for a moment entail that creatures can or do. Moreover, since God has ordained that the laws of logic hold for this world, they cannot both hold and not hold since they forbid *that*

contradiction too. So if it is asked whether God can create a world for which the law of noncontradiction doesn't hold the answer is yes, though we can't conceive of what that would be like. But if it is asked whether God can make creatures in *this* world violate those laws, then we must remember that since the powers that God exercises in creation are ones he has created and taken on, the term "can" in that question must (at least) mean "is logically possible". So the question is synonymous with: is it logically possible that God force creatures to violate logical laws? And the answer is: no, not in *this* world as God presently sustains it. Because if God were to bring it about that creatures violate any of the laws he has set for creation, those laws wouldn't any longer be laws and this world would be trans- formed into another sort of world.[16]

As to the question about whether God could destroy himself, the answer has two parts. The first is to say that so far as God's exercise of the (created) powers he has over creatures is concern-ed, it makes no sense to ask if they could destroy his own non-dependent being. It is the nondependent being of God which created and constantly sustains all the kinds of powers there are in creation including those he himself exercises. The second is to say that if what is being asked about is not the created powers God exercises in creation but about his own being, then the fact that God's being can't be conceived means that it makes no sense to ask about it. Once again, the question presupposes that what can be conceived (self-annihilation) can really apply to God when the claim is to deny that.

4.3.6 Couldn't the theory that God created the world in accordance with eternal ideas in his mind also supply a nonreductionist program for theories? Such a view seems to avoid saying that the

perfections *are* God, and at the same time avoids making any kind of properties more real than any others since all creaturely instances of them would exemplify equally eternal ideas none of which could have failed to exist. In that case reduction would be ruled out not because God called into existence all the kinds of properties and laws (as Dooyeweerd has it), but because they are all equally uncreated. Moreover, couldn't such a view also get around the difficulty that necessary truths seem to be independent of God? If they depend on God's thinking of them, there would still be a sense in which they depend on God and not God on them, even if God didn't call them into being and has no control over them.[17]

This proposal seems only to compound the difficulties with identifying God with the perfections, by adding the problems of the ideas-in-the-mind-of-God theory to them.[18] There is reason to think, for example, that the very notion of maximal perfections runs afoul of the "power set" axiom (no.5) of the Zermelo-Fraenkel axioms which prohibits maximal sets. This applies to perfections when thought of as ideas in God's mind as well as when thought of as his own attributes. There is also grave difficulty in trying to understand creatures as produced by participation in, or exemplification of, perfections (exemplars) in God's mind. The reason is simple: exemplifying is an external relation requiring two terms, so that a creature would already have to exist to stand in such a relation. Thus no creature could come to be by standing in such a relation, or obtain any essential property in that way. There are also good reasons for supposing (as Dooyeweerd held) that there are no kinds without things of those kinds; that created individuals and the kinds of properties and laws true of them exist in correlation. Kinds and properties do not have antecedent existence as mere possibilities from which God then actualizes; God's creating is a

calling into being *ex nihilo* not an actualizing of what is possible independently of him.

But rather than press these points further, let's address the question of whether such a view of God could also succeed in avoiding a reductionist program for theories. It seems to me that it could not because perfections as ideas in God's mind still requires the view that God's being either has or is identical with certain of them. For example, take the perfection of omniscience. On this view, God's omniscience cannot be understood to be a relation God took on toward creation, but a perfection he must have to be God. This is unavoidable because it is the basis for saying that all possible truths exist as ideas in God's mind: only an omniscient being could know all possibilities. But surely it must also be held that God thinks of the ideas in his mind in accordance with the laws of identity and noncontradiction, since knowing all possibilities means knowing what is and is not self-contradictory. I do not see, then, how any advocate of such a view could fail to admit that the logical laws *by which God conceives of the ideas in his mind* are pre-conditions for the existence of his thinking of them. In fact, God's thinking would have to be governed by those laws for God to think of *them* as well as for every other actual and possible truth. And that would mean that, at the very least, the logical laws must be independent of the other necessary truths as well as the whole of creation. They must, therefore, be part of God's own being and cannot merely be among the ideas God thinks of. For if it is denied that logical laws are identical with God, they then become conditions which make it possible for God to be God - since without them he couldn't be omniscient! *But either way a reductionist ontology results*: the logical aspect of creation is nondepend-ent relative to all the others, while the others depend on it.

5. Conclusion

I conclude that the Cappadocian/Calvinist view of the nature of God crucially impacts reduction as a strategy for explanation. If God's attributes are not uncreated, the lesser degrees of them which creatures share may not be regarded as uncreated and do not have to be more real than the kinds of properties not ascribed to God. While this consequence doesn't all by itself *forbid* reduction as a strategy, it clears the way for its rejection. First because it simply doesn't require it; second, because it removes any reason intrinsic to theism for construing the Scripture texts as hyperbole which declare all knowledge and truth to depend on belief in God. And that is what sets up the penultimate step toward the outright rejection of reductionist theories. For it is the conjunction of the prima facie meaning of those texts with a doctrine of creation that holds all properties and laws have been brought into existence out of nothing by God, that *requires* the rejection of reductionism. It does so because any reduction ontology is bound to have large segments which are indistinguishable between its theistic and its nontheistic versions. Appending the claim that the aspects regarded as basic to the rest depend on (or are) God rarely requires more than minor adjustments in the theory. The vast majority of its explanations remain exactly the same whether belief in God is appended or not. Even when accommodated to theism, therefore, they will for the most part be religiously neutral in exactly the way the texts deny any truth can be. So in answer to the question: why can't such theories be accommodated to the doctrine of creation by appending the claim that their reducing aspects depend, in turn, on God? Dooyeweerd's answer is: because that would leave most of the content of such theories religiously neutral (*N.C.* I,121;508-509).

Here we have reached the answer to our question as to why so many Christian thinkers have never suspected that a nonreductionist approach to theories is required by belief in God. It is the under- standing of the nature of God as all and only perfections which was allowed to trump the prima facie meaning of the texts declaring belief in God to be necessary to all truth and knowledge. Since viewing the nature of God as all and only perfections required just the sort of reduction theories that pagan philosophers had been proposing, the prima facie meaning of those texts needed to be construed so as to allow for knowledge of the natural realm which is the same for everyone. On that construal, revealed truth does not for the most part correct, but supplements, the deliverances of "natural reason"; still less does it entail surrendering the entire strategy for explanation on which philosophy and science had always been based.

But if that view of the nature of God is mistaken, then the restriction of the scope of those texts to the realm of supernature in order to make them comport with that view is also mistaken. Thus the possibility of theories being religiously neutral, or of their being acceptable so long as they merely do not contradict the Faith, is forbidden by Scripture texts whose prima facie meaning we must no longer allow to be trumped by a theology of perfections. That is why a truly Christian approach to both philosophy and science must start with the rejection of all reductionism on the grounds that all creation depends directly on God.

And that is the "whence" of the difference Dooyeweerd's philosophy makes for the natural sciences.

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1. "It is vain for any to reason...on the workmanship of the world, except those who...have learned to submit the whole of their individual wisdom (as Paul expresses it) to the foolishness of the cross...the invisible kingdom of Christ fills all things and his spiritual grace is diffused through all." (*Commentary on the First Book of Moses*, Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1948, vol I, p.63.)

2. Historically, there were other influences at work against the prima facie meaning of these texts besides that of intra-scriptural consistency. For example, much of the science and philosophy of the ancient world appeared to have discovered a great many truths in a way that appeared to be independent of belief in God. In other words, the prima facie meaning of the texts simply looked false.

3. The difficulties mainly concern the way the perfections turn out to be preconditions for God's existence rather than the other way round, and the failure of Aquinas' attempt to solve them with his theory of God's simplicity. For a clear and frank exposition of these points, see Alvin Plantinga's *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980).

Despite his clear recognition of the difficulties, Plantinga ends the book with the hope that there may be a way to construe the perfections and other necessary truths so that they somehow depend on God (pp. 140-146). He sticks with the perfectionist view of God because he believes the only alternative to destroy the distinction between necessary and contingent truth. I will argue later that there is an alternative which does no such thing.

4. Every idea of substance involves identifying certain kinds of properties and laws as the essential nature of creatures for the reason that the kinds identified as substance can exist without the other kinds while the other kinds cannot exist without those comprising substance. This is true whether substance is thought of in the Aristotlean sense of a changeless core of being, or in the modern sense of a functional constant making possible all variable phenomena.

5. The quote is from the unpublished paper: "Foundations with Faces: The Truth About the Trinity in Ecumenical Perspective" by Robert Cathey given at Princeton's Center for Theological Inquiry, July, 1994. The paper relies in part in Brian Gerrish's article: "`To the Unknown God': Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness Of God" (*Journal of Religion*, 53/3, July, 1973, 263-292).

6. *Christianity and Classical Culture*, (Yale University Press, 1993, pp. 68-9). Page references for future quotes will be placed in the text.

7. Augustine followed them on this point. Terms such as "trinity" and "three persons" are used, he says, "not because the phrases are adequate to God - they are the only alternatives to silence." (*De Trinitate*, V, 9)

8. In this Calvin seems to directly echo Luther: "Now God in his own nature and majesty is to be

left alone; in this regard we have nothing to do with him, nor does he wish us to deal with him. We have to do with him as clothed and displayed by his Word, by which he presents himself to us." (*Martin Luther*, ed. John Dillenberger. Doubleday Anchor, NY, 1961, p. 196.)

9. On this point, at least, Georges Florovsky's comment that the Cappadocians "did not so much adapt neo-Platonism as overcome it" seems on target. (Pelikan, Ibid. P.8)

10. Dooyeweerd did not, however, understand or defend this claim the way Plantinga takes Descartes to have done. That version is rightly criticized by Plantinga. See *Does God Have a Nature?* p. 95 ff. For a brief statement of what I take to be Dooyeweerd's view, see section 4.2.5 of this essay.

11. This is from a conversation with Dooyeweerd; I do not know whether he ever put the remark in print.

12. See *Does God Have a Nature?*, pp. 51-61.

13. E.g., God ordered Abraham to execute his son (Gen. 22) and sends a "strong delusion" on the wicked "so that they believe what is false" (II Thess. 2:11). Of course, the chief example is that although he could have mercy on all, "he has mercy on whomever he wills, and hardens the heart of whomever he wills" (Rom. 9:18).

14. The allegation that this position leads to logical absurdity has been made often. For a recent statement of it, see Plantinga's criticism of Descartes in *Does God Have a Nature?* p. 95 ff.

15. It is little wonder that this goes unnoticed, when the same mistake is ensconced in virtually every standard logic textbook with respect to the so-called paradoxes of material implication. The paradox is supposed to be that once the premises of an argument are seen to contain a contradiction, every conclusion can be shown to follow by logical rules.

But this is true only if there is a tacit shift the evaluation of the argument to a metalevel at which we no longer take the premises seriously. In fact, at that metalevel the nature of the entire project of evaluating a deduction changes since we no longer try to see *what would be true if the premises were true*. For if those premises were true the laws of identity and noncontradiction would not be, and rather than everything following *there would be no such thing as logical following at all*.

In the case of arguments with contradictory premises, it is ceratinly justified to insist on the laws of logic and deny the premises, since the argument was proferred as a valid deduction. But it is still the unacknowledged shift from object level to metalevel, and the corresponding shift in the nature of the project of logical evaluation, that produces the appearance of a genuine paradox where there is none.

In the discussion of God's transcendence of the laws of creation, however, it produces the

appearance of contradictions where there are none, and begs the very question at issue.

16. This explanation implies that miracles are not to be understood as violations of creation's laws, as Dooyeweerd held (following Augustine). God's powers far exceed what is possible for us, and can bring about events we cannot to call attention to his redemptive acts. But none of those signs break the laws God is at the same time sustaining.

17. These suggestions are in part taken from the end of *Does God Have a Nature?* (pp. 140-146) and in part from conversations with Plantinga.

18. For an excellent discussion of the difficulties with this theory, see James Ross' "God, Creator of Kinds and Possibilities: Requiescant universalia ante res" in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, Audi & Wainwright, eds. (Cornell University Press, 1986, pp. 315 ff.)